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MEETING CENSORSHIP IN THE SCHOOL, A SERIES OF CASE STUDIES.

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NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENG.,CHAMPAIGN,ILL.

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NINE CASE STUDIES ILLUSTRATIVE OF INCIDENTS ARISING FROM THE OBJECTIONS MADE BY INDIVIDUALS TO SPECIFIC BOOKS AND POEMS USED IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES ARE REPORTED HEREIN BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH (NCTE) COMMITTEE TO REPORT ON CASE STUDIES OF CENSORSHIP. EACH STUDY DESCRIBES ANONYMOUSLY (1) THE COMMUNITY'S LOCATION, SIZE, EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMY, NATIONALITY COMPOSITION, AND, IF RELEVANT, ITS POLITICAL OR RELIGIOUS TEMPERAMENT, (2) THE SCHOOL'S SIZE, INCLUSIVE GRADES, TEACHER SALARY SCHEDULE, AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE, (3) THE SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS' EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS, (4) THE TEACHER'S QUALIFICATIONS, TENURE, STATUS, AND RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES, (5) THE COMPLAINT AND THE COMPLAINANT, INCLUDING SPECIFIC CHARGES AND METHOD OF OBJECTING, AND (6) THE REACTION TO THE COMPLAINT, LISTING CHRONOLOGICALLY THE PROCEDURE FOLLOWED BY THE TEACHER, DEPARTMENT, ADMINISTRATION, PRESS, AND OTHER COMMUNITY MEMBERS. BOTH SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL RESPONSES TO CENSORSHIP CHALLENGES ARE INCLUDED. APPENDED IS THE BOOK SELECTION PROCEDURE USED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF THE WAPPINGERS CENTRAL JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS, WAPPINGERS FALLS, NEW YORK. THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE FOR $1.00 FROM NCTE, 508 SOUTH SIXTH STREET, CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS 61820, ORDER NO. 19330. (RD)

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A SERIES OF CASE STUDIES

JOHN HOVE,
CHAIRMAN

TE000 404

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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MEETING CENSORSHIP IN THE SCHOOL:
A SERIES OF CASE STUDIES

BY A COMMITTEE OF
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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FOREWORD

One result of the 1963 PRR-Affiliate Breakfast at the NCTE convention in San Francisco at which problems of book censorship and selection were discussed was the authorization by the Executive Committee of a group within the Council to prepare a series of short case reports of events as they actually happen and incidents involving the censorship of books.

Generally, each case study in the following report describes with anonymity (1) the community, including geographical location, size, educational milieu, economy, and national origins and political or religious environment, if relevant; (2) the school, including its size, grade levels included, salary schedule of teachers, and the educational level of the members of the school board and the administrative structure; (3) the complaint and the objector, including the specific charges, method of objecting, to whom and by whom made; and (4) reaction to the complaint, including a description of the teacher—his qualifications, tenure, status, and relationship with other faculty members—and a chronological listing of the actual steps taken by the teacher, the department, the administration, the press, or others in the community. Included are cases in which the teacher was successful as well as unsuccessful in meeting the challenge of censorship.

These case studies are examples of objections made by individuals to certain books in English classrooms and libraries. Other case reports might be included in a larger study—related complaints against literature and social studies and science curriculums, objections to purposes and topics of class discussions, incidents of "corporate" and

organized complaints, or the use of individual complainants by organizations which remain out of sight. But to include all of these would have extended the scope of this committee's work.

The committee acknowledges the assistance of those in the profession who attended committee meetings and especially those who contributed reports. It is the intention of the committee that these case studies might serve as illustrations for the profession and particularly for the inexperienced and future teachers of English of what the English teacher might do when confronted with attempts to curtail the student's right to read.

JOHN HOVE, *Chairman*
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CASE STUDY I

PAPERBACKS

The community in this report is a metropolitan center of 300,000 in the Great Lakes area. It has a municipal university with a large number of Ph.D. research people, as well as many southern whites and Negroes brought in to work in factories. All religious faiths are represented, but in the schools concerned, the fundamentalist Protestant groups are a majority.

There are about 60,000 children in the schools which include twenty secondary schools and fifty-two elementary schools.

The school where this effort to avoid censorship was made was a junior high school of about 900 students in the middle of what teachers uncomfortably called "the Bible Belt of the city." Over half of the teachers had master's degrees, loads were reasonable, and the administrative staff competent and interested in instruction.

Over a period of years, complaints to the principal had been made over books such as *The Diary of Anne Frank* as "pro-Jewish," of *The Catcher in the Rye* as "a dirty book," over books by Charles Lindbergh as "writings by that Nazi."

One young English teacher of ninth grade asked permission to use quantities of paperbacks to develop an interest in reading. Subject to using lists from recognized sources such as American Library Association and National Council of Teachers of English, he was told to proceed.

Before the year started, he wrote a letter to each parent making such statements as these:

"We realize that in some countries books have been burned and children have been denied the cultural heritage of the past. We are grateful it is not so in America and that here all children are taught to read and books are plentiful.

"In order for children to realize before leaving junior high school the richness of this reading world opened to them, I have obtained permission to change our ninth grade literature course to an open reading experience. Each child will read four selected books in common with every other child. The other choices of books will be individual ones. The librarian and I will guide but not choose these *free* books.

"The books on our lists were chosen from lists prepared by the American Library Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. We have tried to select from their lists, books which will interest our children.

"We hope you will read these books with your children, and we will welcome a conference about how your child is growing in reading interest or the effect of any special books upon his thinking."

In the three years in which the resource teacher and language arts director saw this plan in operation, there were some half dozen requests for conferences. These were pleasant in nature and ended in warm approval for the teacher and the plan.

There was no attempt to eliminate controversial books. Salinger was one author included.

The teacher gained tenure during this period and also achieved a master's degree. He headed his department. Other teachers were afraid to follow his example in spite of his success. They pointed to his bachelorhood as a reason for his fearlessness.

There was no newspaper publicity.

CASE STUDY II

"A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICA"

"THE NEGRO HERITAGE LIBRARY"

Between March 2, 1965, and March 24, 1965, four citizens of a large urban school district in California complained to the local school board about the district's adoption of *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America* by Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer[1] and *The Negro Heritage Library* (particularly the volume *A Martin King Treasury*).[2] The complaints charged that the authors or associates of the authors had been "connected with communist front organizations." Specifically Hughes was identified as the author of "atheistic" poetry, and his book was described as an attempt "to create race hatred in our nation" and "create a guilt complex in our children's minds for past conditions that they cannot presently change."

Problems of race relations had been troubling the school district for many years. During World War II, many Negroes moved north to this community to get jobs in a large shipyard or in one of the many military supply centers. By March, 1965, 50 percent of the district's elementary school children were Negro, and the schools near the waterfront were almost entirely Negro. The wealthier hill area schools were almost entirely white. Civil rights groups demanded that the school board do something about de facto segregation, and in response the board appointed a citizens' committee to study the

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[1] Langston Hughes and Milton Meltzer (eds.), *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1956).

[2] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Martin King Treasury* (1964). *Negro Heritage Library,* ed. Alfred E. Cain (Yonkers, N. Y.: Educational Heritage, Inc.).

problem. The committee recommended boundary changes and numerous school reforms such as increased counseling and class size reductions. When the board decided not to change boundaries and found it could not afford most of the suggested reforms, community opinion became more polarized and the complaints about the schools increased.

It was in this situation that the four book complaints were made. Two of the four complaints were submitted to the school board in a public meeting. One man read a two-page statement representing the desires of "a group of interested parents." The other complaint, also from a man, was in the form of a telegram to the board. The other two complaints were filed by women, both following the NCTE form "Request for Reconsideration of a Book," which had been adopted by the district.

The superintendent, following the adopted policy of the board, appointed a committee of six teachers and nine administrators to study and respond to the complaints. The committee began by compiling a list of trends—what people were saying about the books and what agencies were using the books. Favorable comments were collected from Senator Jacob Javits, Roy Wilkins, the *Library Journal,* and the *New York Herald Tribune.* The agencies using the books included the United States Air Force and the school districts of New York City and Compton, California.

Next the committee secured a statement on historical accuracy from seven professors in the Department of History, University of California, Berkeley. The statement said in part:

> After examining the two most important volumes involved in the present controversy, we can see no grounds whatever for their exclusion from school libraries. As you are perhaps aware, six of us participated a year ago in preparing a report on the treatment of the Negro in American history texts. In general the pattern that we found was one of neglect and distortion. . . .
>
> In this context it is more than a little upsetting to us that this slight step forward should be opposed by certain elements in the community. As we understand them, the grounds for exclusion have little if anything to do with the content of the books, which after all is what will be communicated to the student reader. The charge of *atheism,*

> especially in the case of the King volume, is patently ridiculous. Beyond this, there seems to be concern with the alleged political associations of several of the authors. As scholars we would reject in principle the idea that the contents of libraries should be subject to any sort of political censorship.

The committee in its report recommended that both books be retained in the schools and that two changes be made in the regulations on book complaints. The first change replaced "Initial action on any written request" with "Initial action on a request on the proper form." This change meant that the superintendent was not obligated to convene the review committee until the complaint was on a proper form. The second change was the addition of the following sentence: "In no case should any book be excluded because of the race or nationality, or the political or religious views of the writer."

Since the school board approved all of the recommendations of the committee, it appeared the issue was resolved. But in the same school district and during the same school year, a parent complained to a principal about a poem being used in a junior high English class. The principal responded by requiring that all available copies of the poem be collected and removed from the school. When the same parent complained to Max Rafferty, California's state superintendent of schools, Dr. Rafferty sent to the district a letter asking for an investigation. The English teacher was then called to the district superintendent's office for a conference.

The result was that the poem was withdrawn without any written complaint and without any review by teachers. Furthermore, throughout the proceedings the teacher thought he was in danger of being dismissed, even though he was generally regarded as one of the outstanding English teachers in the district. There is reason to believe that this incident, widely known among English teachers in the district, contributed to more than one case of self-censorship among teachers who, if nothing else, desired to stay out of trouble. The unsuccessful attempt to resist censorship usually culminates in a moment of quiet retreat, and it can occur in districts which at other times are concerned about academic freedom.

CASE STUDY III

"THE CATCHER IN THE RYE"

One school in which objection to the use of *The Catcher in the Rye*[1] occurred had several years earlier received national press attention when a parent had protested a young teacher's developing a syntax exercise from *Mad* magazine. One sentence, in which Grandpa was cited as having trained his dog, Spot, to bite the postman, brought a letter from the Postmaster General in which he deplored the number of letter carriers who had been bitten the previous year —6,000. As a result of that incident (the first-year teacher was backed by her department head, administration, and board of education), and a later ruckus over a poodle's bladder troubles in Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie,* the English department formally adopted a book selection procedure, as well as a method for processing a citizen's complaint about a book, both methods subsequently receiving the approval of the board of education.

The senior high school of this centralized district has an enrollment of about 1,600 students in grades ten through twelve. It is located in a suburban semirural area about sixty miles from New York City. Due to the establishment and quarter-century expansion of a large industry in the area, the school system has grown in the past twenty years from a total student enrollment of 1,200 to its present 10,000. The descendants of the early Dutch, and later Irish, Italian, and other immigrant settlers are now but a segment of the wide range of background represented in today's population. Although many Negroes and Puerto Ricans have moved into nearby river cities, the racial proportion of the district is overwhelmingly white. Among the new residents, there has been a substantial influx from the Midwest and the South, with a minority of these new-

[1] J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951).

comers being religious fundamentalists who have formed their own congregations instead of joining locally established Protestant communions.

Although not able to match the salary schedules of schools closer to New York City, this central school district competes rather favorably for staff with the other good schools in the area. Among its board members are numbered two Ph.D.'s and a lawyer, with all other members prominent in industrial or business managerial positions. Each member of the forty-member junior-senior high school English department has a strong English major. Many of the English teachers, and their department head, are active in county, state, and national English councils and are encouraged, and in many instances subsidized, to attend meetings of these organizations.

Some time ago, *The Catcher in the Rye* was listed on one English 11 teacher's list of possible choices for outside reading. Although she was in her first year in the high school, this teacher had four years of previous teaching experience—one at the elementary and three at the junior high school level. The mother of two teenage boys, she had earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in English. During the first semester of her first probationary year, she was pleased and amused by a very perceptive book report on *Catcher,* submitted by a student in one of her junior sections. The teacher especially enjoyed the girl's statement that she both liked and hated Holden and suspected that she, herself, was a little like him. The teacher assigned an A grade to the paper.

A few days later, the teacher received a phone call from the girl's mother, who objected to her daughter's having read *Catcher* and to the presence of the title on the teacher's list of book report choices. The mother also phoned the department head, who reminded the parent that a year earlier he had explained to her the department's policy for the selection of both texts to be required or taught in class and books for outside reading. At that time the parent had been visiting the high school's paperback book store to inspect choices available for student purchase. The department head had informed the mother that any book listed in the *Standard Catalog for High*

School Libraries could properly be sold, in paperbound form, from the school book store.

The woman making the objection had several children in the local public schools, the eldest being the young girl who had read *Catcher*. All of the children seemed to be pleasant, above-average students and popular with both peers and teachers. The father and mother were both college graduates, lived in a fine house that would seem to indicate an above-average income and standard of living, and were members of a small Protestant church congregation, one of the newer in the area. Although the minister of this church had earlier objected to the use of *Catcher* in the local high school and had written to a local paper a letter backing the mother's position, at no time did the mother indicate that she was speaking for this church or for any other group.

On the same day she had called the department head, the mother telephoned again and this time, with evident emotion, said that she was probably unjustified in her previous objection. A few nights later, however, she appeared at a junior-senior high school PTA meeting to repeat her objection and ask that the PTA support her request to have the book removed from the teacher's booklist.

Despite the fact that several junior high school girls, who had just completed presenting a demonstration, were seated with their parents in the audience, the lady proceeded to cite three instances in *Catcher* in which a basic four-letter word was used. As to her request that the PTA take action, the chairman ruled that consideration of such an objection was not properly within the discretion of the organization.

At the next regular meeting of the board of education, the mother, accompanied by five other parents, one of them her minister, protested the inclusion of the book on a student reading list. The board of education assured the group that they would check to see if the listing of *Catcher* were in accordance with book selection procedures previously approved by the board of education. Several board members pointed out that other parents had publicly expressed approval of the book and did not consider it objectionable.

As a result of publicity resulting from the mother's appearance before the PTA and board of education, three area newspapers noted the objection, and letters to the editor were printed in each news source. The matter was also aired on a radio call-in opinion program. After a few days, in the newspaper with the largest local circulation, an editorial appeared which defended the book as "funny . . . warm and tender . . . a classic" which "tells . . . of a boy and his grapplings with the stirrings of manhood." Holden, the editorial writer continued, "is not apt to corrupt the morals of anyone. . . . *The Catcher in the Rye* is not, by any stretch of the imagination, to be aligned with trash which is readily available in many stores and is being read by teenagers, whether parents know it or not." The writer endorsed efforts of the district attorney to curtail sale of "trashy books aimed at the teenage market but to have anyone imply that *The Catcher in the Rye* is akin to *Fanny Hill* is carrying things too far."

Although many of the letters to the editor were disapproving of *Catcher,* Salinger, and the local English department, many other parents and former students supported the book and the local staff. In addition, two Protestant ministers within the school district community brought the case to the attention of their congregations. One pastor sent each member of his congregation a mimeographed letter in which he defended Salinger, *Catcher,* and praised the local English department. The other made supportive references to the book in a Sunday sermon.

After the meeting of the board of education at which the parents had appeared, the chairman of the board's curriculum committee contacted the head of the English department, who assured him that *Catcher* was listed in the 1963 supplement of the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries* and was also listed in *Books for You* of the National Council of Teachers of English. The department head also supplied the administration and board of education with such printed discussions involving *Catcher* as Father Harold Gardiner's "Words and Conscience" (*America,* 1-7-61); Fred H. Marcus' *"The Catcher in the Rye:* A Live Circuit" (*English Journal,* 1-63); Mary Newland's "Reason and Rules" (*Ave Maria,* 5-9-64); Edward P. J.

Corbett's "Raise High the Barriers, Censors" (*America,* 1-7-61); and Francis E. Kearns' "Salinger and Golding: Conflict on the Campus" (*America,* 1-26-63).

At the next meeting of the board of education, the chairman of the curriculum committee reported to the board of education that the listing of *Catcher* satisfied the criteria set by the English department and approved by the board. For the benefit of those interested and present—the parents, the lady's minister, and the press, he restated the complete book selection policy of the English department. The curriculum committee chairman further reiterated the English department's and board of education's position that no student, in classroom instruction or for outside reading, would be forced to study or read a book to which his parents objected, but, he continued, ". . . books available for such classroom instruction cannot be denied to other students because of such objection." After the completion of the chairman's report, the board voted unanimously that *The Catcher in the Rye* might properly remain on any high school English teacher's list and that whether or not it was read was a decision for the individual student and his parents.

CASE STUDY IV

"TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD"—I

This case study originated in 1965 in a midwestern university city of 150,000, which had not been completely free from censorship problems in the past. The superintendent some time earlier had summarily removed *Little Black Sambo* from elementary school libraries and from the elementary Project English curriculum at the request of a civil rights group. He later capitulated. This community, generally prosperous, considers itself somewhat conservative politically, although at the time it was represented in Congress by a Democratic freshman. The city prides itself on its number of churches, primarily Protestant with smaller populations of Roman Catholic and Jewish worshipers. It does maintain a good public school system; a demanding and exhaustive Project English curriculum has been utilized on an experimental basis, Grades K-12, since 1963.

This particular case arose in a junior high school of 521 students, located in a lower socioeconomic area. The salary schedule averages the highest in the state, with a starting salary for teachers at $4,950, and reaching a maximum of $8,500. The school board includes six college educated men, all of whom are business and professional men, one being a professor of education. The board itself played a minimal role in this case, which was actually resolved by the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum, one of four assistant superintendents.

This complaint was originated by a minister of a fundamentalist church. His church, located near the heart of the city, has some 500 members, who are generally in the lower social and economic classes. One parent involved in this case is the operator of a small cold-freezer plant and one, a clerk in a department store. The minister is

a member not of the Council of Churches but of another ministerial fellowship.

This minister was acting on behalf of the parents of two students in an eighth grade English class which was reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*.[1] He initially appeared at the junior high school in November, 1965, presenting himself to the principal, who immediately summoned the assistant principal and the teacher of the eighth grade English class. The teacher had been active in the formulation of the Project English curriculum being used in this school. She first explained the entire unit within which *To Kill a Mockingbird* was being taught; the unit was entitled "The Noble Man in Western Culture." She also explained the method of presenting this book and especially its thematic significance.

The minister countered with his verbal objections; he *had* read the book at that time. He received a copy of "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book."

About a month later, the minister presented his written objection, one copy to the teacher, one to the principal, one to the superintendent of schools, and one to the newspaper. At no place in the complaint was the word *Negro* capitalized.

Once this complaint was published in the newspapers, the reactions were vociferous, dominating the "Public Pulse" for at least a month. It may be significant to note that every letter in favor of the book was signed; every letter opposing it, with the exception of one, was submitted anonymously. One came from another part of the state, not from the city itself. The uproar spread to other cities in the state which were using the Project English materials. Radio and television stations devoted panel discussions to the subject, and the minister was a guest on two of them.

The resolution of the complaint was far from dramatic. The assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum appeared at the Citizens' Advisory Board meeting (part of the PTA) at the regularly scheduled January, 1966, meeting, and announced that he had con-

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[1] Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1960).

sidered the matter completely, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* would remain in the Project English curriculum. If parents felt their children should not read this book, they might make written objection, and the child would not read the book. Exactly how this procedure was to be implemented had not been determined, whether the student would be sent to the library to read another book of comparable content and intent and quality or whether he would be kept in the classroom to do his substitute reading. The problem is academic for the present; all eighth grade classes in Project English have already read this title.

Up to this point, the actual teacher and school involved had not been named in the press. After the resolution of the complaint, the teacher appeared on a panel with the minister, listened to his comments about "hard-nosed English teachers," and watched as he distributed to the junior and senior high school age students at this meeting mimeographed copies of his original complaint, which quoted the profanity from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When the teacher left this meeting, she observed many of these students clustered under the street lights reading these sheets of straight profanity.

CASE STUDY V

"TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD"—II

Another case involving the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*[1] occurred in a New England city of 20,000. It is an industrial community located in a geographical area that encourages tourists, both summer and winter. The population is varied, the majority being native stock and the next largest group being French, with smaller Greek, Jewish, and Irish populations. Many families are from the metropolitan areas, coming to retire or to escape from the cities. The high school has about 850 students. The community also has a very small parochial high school and two parochial elementary schools.

The teacher is an experienced teacher with a Master of Arts degree, having taught twenty years in the high schools of New England. In the same year, 1964, she was selected the state's "Teacher of the Year" and was one of the five finalists in national competition for this honor. Here is an account of the incident as written by this teacher:

"The objector I do not know at all, had never met him before and have not seen him since; but I believe that he is a sincere and good man who felt he needed to protect his family. He admitted openly that he had never read the book. He had simply picked it up when his son brought it home, and in leafing it through, had found some words he didn't like. He circulated a petition, but at the hearing no one spoke up on his side except himself. Several people had been quite vocal anonymously on our open mike radio programs. He insisted that there be a public hearing before the school board. The head of my department spoke, also a minister."

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[1] Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1960).

Following is a copy of the prepared remarks the teacher made at this meeting.

"My Objectives in Teaching TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

"Thank you, Mr. S———, and members of the school board, for giving me the opportunity to come here tonight and explain to you and the guests here my objectives in teaching Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I am also particularly glad to meet Mr. S———, whom I have not had a chance to know except by anonymous phone call last week on Tuesday. First, I should like to give you a bit of background about the use of the book. It has been on our outside reading list for free reading since its publication in 1960. Last year it was taught in all the general English XII classes under our expanded reading program. This year, in my class, it was listed with the other books for class reading on a sheet of the year's program handed to all the students the first week of school in September. Last October 9, the book was given to the class, as previously announced. On Tuesday, the 13th, I received an anonymous call stating objections to the book, and although I asked the gentleman several times if he would not come to the school to discuss the problem with me in order that we might reach a better understanding of each other's viewpoints, he did not wish to do this. On Wednesday, at Mr. B———'s request, I announced to the class (according to long-established school policy) that anyone not wishing to read the book should return it to me and would be given another more acceptable to him or her. No books were returned. Yesterday, at Mr. S———'s request, I announced that we would not discuss the book yesterday nor today because of this meeting. I also urged the class to remember the words of Voltaire: 'Although I disagree with everything you say, I will defend to the death your right to say it.' I asked them to remember that, therefore, anyone was free to object to the book. Mr. S———'s name has never been mentioned in the class. I also urged them to think about the point emphasized so strongly by Harper Lee in the book that it is vital for people to try to understand the viewpoints of others.

"I had not expected any discussion following this announcement, but these are alert and intelligent eighteen-year-olds. They had things to say, and since I had just spoken up for free speech, I could not ask them to keep silent. They commented that they had found the book a wonderful one; that if one bans books, there is no place to stop; that they have only eight more months in which to learn maturity of judgment and understanding, of how to meet life's problems and choices; and over and over they asked me, 'Miss P———, what is wrong with this book?' I tried to present the other viewpoints as I have heard them, but really answered only one question. One student said, 'What happens if we are told on Monday that we cannot continue to discuss this book?' This question I had to answer and wish to make clear now what my answer is. If my class and I (and thus, of course, ultimately other classes and other teachers) are not to be allowed to continue to discuss this book, I shall have to ask the L——— School Board to accept my resignation.

"From my conversation with Mr. S——— and from what I have heard reported, I gather that there are two main objections to the book. One is the supposed event which leads to the trial. Of course no act of rape was committed, and the point of that part of the book is not the event at all but the injustice of condemning an innocent man because of his race. I find it difficult to believe that there is an eighteen-year-old in most parts of the United States who does not know that unfortunately such evil acts are committed in real life. This book is certainly condemning such an act, but the point is that it was never committed. Mr. S———'s other objection is, I believe, to some of the words used in the book. Frankly, outside of the word *rape,* I could not remember any others, although I have read the book probably a dozen times in order to teach it. He read some of the words to me, and I have since tried to find them because I did not copy down the pages at that time. I have found five after some hunting. It had never occurred to me that they were important since they have no connection with the point of the book and have, of course, never been mentioned nor discussed in class. As a matter of fact, at one point in the book Atticus mentioned that all children

go through a stage of using bad language, but if parents do not focus attention on it, the children stop soon since they are only doing it to attract attention. Perhaps I might add that since finding these words, I have discovered that one of them, with its derivatives, is mentioned fifty-two times in the Bible. Of course, as in the Bible, this vocabulary is used either to state a fact or for the sake of realism and has no importance in the purpose of the book.

"What, then, is the purpose of the book and my reason for teaching it? I love to teach. I have spent over half my life working with young people in school and in church and working with language, the miracle that makes us human. It is through language that we think, communicate, express our ideas, and transmit them down the years. Why study literature? Because it is one of the humanities—one of the ways by which man expresses his beliefs, his hopes, his understandings. The study of literature helps us to develop understanding of ourselves and others without having to experience directly every aspect of life. It helps us to develop critical judgment of good and poor expression, logical and illogical thought, even truth and untruth. It helps us to develop responsibility as individuals, as members of families, as citizens. It helps us to develop values, ideals, a sense of purpose, an understanding of what life is all about. I consider this book, *To Kill a Mockingbird,* a superior resource for such development because the basic idea of the book is that prejudice poisons the mind, and that the only cure is understanding.

"One of the key sentences in the book is spoken by Atticus Finch, a wise and good man, 'You never really understand a person until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.' This, I tell my classes, is what we mean by *empathy,* actually trying to feel what another feels. The book is often thought of as a novel of race problems, but actually there are many prejudices in the book: one section of town against another, old families against newcomers, educated against uneducated, ignorant against wise, white against Negro, Negro against white, religiosity against real religion, and nearly everyone against the unknown—the root of all prejudice.

"This is the story of maturing minds, those of the two children

left without their mother and being brought up by their father and a wonderful Negro housekeeper. Seniors are not too old to remember their own problems in growing up, yet they are old enough to have thought a great deal about discipline, the problems of bringing up children. They are thinking ahead to a time when they will be parents and especially to the few months from now when they will be expected to take their places as adults in the community. They know that children need security, and they appreciate the love and understanding Atticus gives Jem and Scout. They realize that, while children need firmness, they also must have their questions answered. They like the fact that Atticus never refuses to answer the children's questions and expects them to continue asking until they understand. They realize the importance of courage beyond physical bravery. Although Atticus is a crack shot and kills the mad dog that endangers the neighborhood, when madness in a man makes him spit in Atticus' face, because this is a man and not an animal, Atticus reacts with moral and spiritual courage and reason, not with physical force. Most of all, students respect Atticus because he is an adult who practices what he preaches. More than ever today young people are questioning us as adults when our lives do not measure up to our words.

"Of course the book is timely—even more now than when it was written. After the trial when Atticus is trying to explain to Jem and Scout why Tom, who was innocent, was found guilty by the jury, he says: 'There's something in our world that makes men lose their heads—they couldn't be fair if they tried. In our courts, when it's a white man's word against a black man's, the white man always wins. They're ugly, but those are the facts of life. . . . The older you grow the more of it you'll see. The one place where a man ought to get a square deal is in a courtroom, be he any color of the rainbow, but people have a way of carrying their resentment right into a jury box. As you grow older you'll see white men cheat black men every day of your life, but let me tell you something and don't you forget it—whenever a white man does that to a black man, no matter who he is, how rich he is, or how fine a family he comes from, that white man is trash . . . it's all adding up and one of these days we're going

to pay the bill for it. I hope it's not in you children's time.' Well, it is in our children's time. The lesson of this book is the lesson great men like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., recent winner of the Nobel Prize, have tried to teach. Dr. King said: 'The Negro must work passionately for full stature as a citizen, but he must not use inferior methods to gain it . . . without dependence on God our efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest nights. . . . The Negro must never come to terms with falsehood, malice, hate, or destruction.'

"Above all, this book, unlike so many other modern novels, is full of hope. It does tell us there is evil in the world, and we cannot hide from it nor refuse to admit its existence. We must be able to identify it as evil, but then we must give our lives to overcoming it, not by stooping to its level but by meeting it with good. We have to choose what kind of people we are going to be: those who are overcome by evil, or those who overcome evil with good. Miss Maudie said: 'We're so rarely called on to be Christians, but when we are, we've got men like Atticus to go for us.' When I teach this book, I look at my students and hope that they and I myself will learn to be like Atticus, to meet ignorance, hatred, prejudice, not with more ignorance, hatred, prejudice, but with understanding, goodness, love. This is my purpose in reading and teaching Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*."

The teacher reports that the board voted that no action was necessary, but the superintendent was instructed to inform the English department that it had the school board's confidence in its choice of books. She concludes:

"A relative of the objector, who may have been the real instigator behind him, took the question to the state department of education, which backed us fully, and also the state council of churches, which again endorsed our position. I believe nothing further was done. I have just finished the book with my senior class this year and have had no protests."

CASE STUDY VI

"THE GOOD EARTH"

A county seat town with a population of approximately 9,000 according to the 1960 census, the midwestern community in which this particular censorship case occurred now has a population of approximately 14,000. With its own distinct identification, governmental structures, and school district, the town is located on the edge of a metropolitan area of approximately 1,000,000 population fourteen miles via an interstate expressway from the heart of the metropolitan area. Since many of the residents work in the city, the town is sometimes referred to as a "bedroom city." There is no significant industry in the town, and the largest payroll in the town is that of a church-related college of 1,000 students.

The presence of this college adds to the complexity of the general image of the town since the college is affiliated with a religious denomination that is traditionally known as conservative though not fundamentalist. Many of the college faculty and administrative personnel have throughout the years resisted rigid control by the supporting denomination. The English department, for example, feels no restraint in studying whatever examples of contemporary literature are appropriate in its designated courses. Likewise, the English department has been very much concerned with the problem of censorship in the public schools and has discussed this problem in its general undergraduate courses as well as in specialized courses preparing students for public school teaching. Thus its student teachers, who do their practice teaching in the schools of the town and the greater metropolitan area, have frequently discussed the problems of censorship with their supervising public school teachers. As a result, the English department is generally known throughout the area as one which supports the idea that the student should have freedom in

his choice of reading material and that the public school teacher, likewise, should have complete freedom in selecting material appropriate for the course that is being taught. It is through the close relationship of the college English department and some of the local public school English teachers that this particular case of censorship came to the attention of the NCTE committee.

As indicated by the growth in population during the past few years, there has been an influx of new residents coming from diverse backgrounds, but the overall population may be described as middle class with a small percentage of the population falling in the category of professional persons such as doctors, lawyers, and teachers. At the present time there is a general state of discontent in the town because the older residents try to maintain the status quo and the newer residents seek to bring about changes in the governmental structure.

Since its founding, the town has been Democratic, and in 1966, for the first time in its history, the county's one-party rule was broken with the election of three Republicans to key political offices. A majority of the residents are affiliated, either actively or nominally, with Protestant churches—Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Presbyterian—but there is one Catholic church which maintains its own elementary school. In addition there are one Assembly of God congregation and one Nazarene church. Within the past ten years, two Lutheran churches and one Episcopalian church have been organized.

For some residents the business district is adequate for basic needs. Others, particularly some of the newer residents, find the business district inadequate and depend upon the large metropolitan area for major shopping. Entertainment facilities of the town are quite limited, and many of the residents depend upon the facilities of the metropolitan area. Thus some residents are only superficially identified with the problems of the town.

The school district consists of one high school, one junior high school, four elementary schools, and one kindergarten. Insofar as the students are concerned, the school district is completely integrated, and there have been no problems in this respect. There are,

however, no Negroes on the teaching staff. For several years the salary scale was such that the public schools served as a stepping stone for a beginning teacher to gain experience and then move on to districts with more attractive salaries. The beginning salary for a person with a bachelor's degree and no experience in 1966 was $5,100. For a person with a master's degree in the subject which he was to teach, the beginning salary was $5,700. The school board consists of six men: an attorney, a dentist, the owner of a clothing store, the owner of an oil company, the vice-president of a bank, and the minister of education in one of the churches.

Some of the older English teachers have at times deleted books from the departmental reading list; generally they have made such deletions only on the basis that the books are objectionable, with no explanation being offered or recorded. Other teachers—including the one to whom this complaint was made—have allowed their students much freedom in selecting materials. At the time of the complaint, this particular teacher had been teaching for eight years, four of which were in the present system; she had a bachelor's degree, had done some additional study, and is now pursuing work toward the completion of a master's degree at a nearby state university. She is one of the most highly respected teachers in the system, among her students and colleagues alike. Likewise, she has maintained a high degree of respect from the parents of the students in her classes. Since the students in her accelerated seventh grade class were reading on the level of students in grades ten through twelve, the teacher allowed the students to do independent reading with the requirement that each student write a paper on the book which he had read. In this particular instance, the teacher suggested that one of her students read *The Good Earth* by Pearl Buck.[1]

When the student started reading the book, the mother made a complaint to the teacher. (The family is in an upper income bracket which is designated in the town as the "Country Club Set." If the family were residents of a much larger area, however, the distinction of "Country Club Set" would not be used.) The father is a graduate

[1] Pearl Buck, *The Good Earth* (New York: John Day Company, 1949).

of a midwestern university, did graduate work at an Ivy League university in the East, and for the past several years has been employed by a large business organization with headquarters in this midwestern metropolitan area. The mother indicated that she had read the book and felt that the daughter did not have sufficient background to read it. Her first complaint was made by telephone; later the teacher and mother met and continued the conversation. Two parts of the book were isolated in the complaint: (1) the section which presents a description of childbirth; and (2) the section which describes the visit of a man to a house of ill-repute to take a second wife. According to the teacher, the mother made the complaint graciously and tactfully but with a strong feeling that *The Good Earth* should not be read by her daughter.

The teacher's immediate reaction was one of surprise since she had never been faced with this kind of situation before. She agreed to the mother's request that *The Good Earth* not be read by the child and asked the mother's assistance in selecting a book which would be acceptable to her. The teacher used a booklist prepared by a large metropolitan library, indicating works that should be read before a person is 21 years of age, but the student selected *The Little Minister* because she had seen a dust jacket of that book in the classroom. It was generally known, however, that the student finished reading *The Good Earth* and discussed it rather freely among other students. The mother made no specific threats against the teacher's job in the school system, but the teacher felt that she should discuss the complaint with the principal, a man who is generally known as one who does not become upset by either student or parental complaint. He felt that the teacher should not change a designated program to fit the demands of one parent. In this case, however, the individual teacher chose to follow the parent's request for a second selection. The details of this matter did not come to the attention of the general public, and no information was presented in the local newspapers.

There were, however, significant developments at a later date. Students in other English classes began requesting permission to

read either *The Good Earth* or other works by Pearl Buck. Other teachers in the school who knew of the situation removed the works of Miss Buck from the reading lists rather than taking positive steps which would prepare the student, the school, and the community for the study of such works. Likewise, the teacher who received the complaint has not suggested the reading of Miss Buck's works since that time. Thus there has been a degree of censorship, even though the issue did not reach the attention of the general public or cause adverse publicity. This particular teacher now feels that, if she were faced with a similar situation, her response would be similar to the one she had in handling the complaint against *The Good Earth*. If, however, the complaint were directed against a book which was being read by all of the members of her class, she would not make adjustments to fit a specific demand from a parent. However, she has not been faced with this problem and has had only one complaint: a boy, the son of a local minister, indicated that he did not like the language of *Kon-Tiki,* because it was "rough and vulgar." The teacher suggested, however, that such language is widely used by persons in different segments of society, and the student completed the book as was assigned.

CASE STUDY VII

"1984"

The school described here is located in a rural village, population about 120, in the upper Midwest. The educational level of the general populace is primarily high school, the men being employed by the nearby steel and paper mills. Many of the families are of German descent. (At this point, the report from the school district made the observation that the teacher in question was Catholic, while all of the board members were Protestant.)

In 1961 the school had 400 students from first to twelfth grade. The salary schedule ranged from $4,300 to $6,400 in eleven steps. The superintendent had a master's degree in mathematics. The board members consisted of one registered nurse, one housewife, one farmer, one engineer, and two mill workers, all with at least a high school education.

A book was banned at the school on the grounds that it was obscene. A special meeting of the school board was called to which the teacher in question was not invited, and on the day following the meeting, he was informed by letter that he was to withdraw the assignment, which involved reading *1984*.[1] A member of the board issued the complaint because he was under the impression that his daughter was to read the book. It later turned out that this particular student had not received the assignment.

The teacher in question was a man with approximately ten years of teaching experience. He had left two previous teaching positions under somewhat clouded circumstances (the exact details are not available), but the school board report indicates that he had a good

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[1] George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949).

record and good recommendations when he was hired by their school. The school report comments on the fact that he applied for the position the day before school started. To that comment the teacher himself replied that he had been in graduate school the preceding summer, had intended to continue with his education during the school year, and only at the last minute, because of his wife's illness, had decided to seek a teaching position.

The incident occurred during the teacher's third year in the school district, where there was no tenure other than the state's Continuing Contract Law, which the teacher felt to be sufficient in most cases.

The school report discusses the teacher in these terms. "For the first year he did a good job of teaching but did not get along well with the other teachers. The superintendent could not give him a directive without a scene. The only way an order could be given was to give it to the coach, who was also a Catholic. He would relay it to the English teacher. The second year he was here, it was discovered he was taking tranquilizers, and he alternated between elation and depression of mood. He would listen to no one about curriculum or methods, and he would leave his classes alone for long periods—even leaving the school to go to the doctor without checking out. About this time he assigned the book *1984* to his senior English class and asked them to buy the book, since there was only one copy in the library. Some parents objected to this and brought the matter to the attention of the school board. The board then asked him to meet with them, and the teacher rather lost his head."

In an interview later the teacher explained the situation from his position somewhat differently. He had divided his class into ability groups, and it was only the top level group which was asked to read this book. The teacher was aware that the book had been the subject of controversy in other schools, and he had carefully checked two separate acceptable lists for high school reading before the assignment was given. The book appeared on both lists. He also informed the principal that he intended to give the assignment; the principal made no comment at that time. The first awareness of a problem came when the librarian and the teacher both received letters from

the school board in regard to the book, which was removed from the library shelves. The teacher felt the action placed him in a position of having to defend his principles, and he refused to comply with the directive. At this time the local teachers' association requested a second meeting with the school board.

At this point a vast confusion seemed to develop. There was total lack of communication between the teacher and the school board; whether or not the book was "lewd and indecent," as charged, was almost forgotten. Each side appeared unwilling to seek a common ground, and the entire matter became a highly publicized controversy with each position having its proponents.

The teacher's inability to reach the state education association office for almost four days encouraged further fermentation rather than a quick and quiet settlement. When the state education association finally entered into the case, they were able to have the teacher reinstated for the remainder of the school year after the assignment was withdrawn as required reading. By this time the school board had legal representation from the state school board association, which assisted in drawing up the reasons for firing this teacher at the end of the school year. The book itself was not directly mentioned in the reasons for terminating the teacher's employment.

Throughout the controversy, the school board maintained that they were justified in their attitude by the contents of the Code of Ethics for teachers, specifically in their final argument, the "Second Principle: the members of the teaching profession share with parents the task of shaping each student's purposes and acts toward socially acceptable ends. The effectiveness of many methods of teaching is dependent upon cooperative relationships with the home." From this the school board concluded that they have the right to aid parents in the determination of what is best for their children.

The teacher in question feels that the controversy actually started with his assignment of the book. Strictly unofficial community comments have indicated that the book may merely have been used as a means of firing this teacher, who was not well liked in the district. However, the teacher feels that he, as an individual, was not the

issue in the final settlement. Rather he feels he may have been used as a pawn in a power play between the representative organizations for teachers and school boards. This man has never been offered another teaching position, and he has been informed (again unofficially) that he will never teach in this state again. It is his position that the real question was, "Who is legally responsible for the curriculum?" and the outcome of his case seems to indicate that the answer is the school board. Had he known that by not taking the case to court he would never teach again, the teacher says now, he most assuredly would have fought it out to the end, but at the time he thought it best not to create more controversy.

As a result of this situation, the teacher had a nervous breakdown which has disqualified him for Job Corps teaching. At present he is being retrained to be a florist.

CASE STUDY VIII

"THE BEDFORD INCIDENT"

This case study[1] presents an example of professional procedures that a number of schools are using when confronted with a parent's complaint about a particular title. In this instance, the complainant used the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book" form recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English. His objections to *The Bedford Incident*[2] are indicated.

CITIZEN'S REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION
OF A BOOK

Author Rascovich, Mark
Title The Bedford Incident
Publisher McClelland & Stewart

Request initiated by _____

Complainant represents

x himself
_____ (name organization) _____
_____ (identify other group) _____

1. To what in the book do you object? (Please be specific; cite pages) 201. Pars. 4, 17, 24, 27, 59, 155, 262 plus other pages with profanity and the taking of God's name in vain.

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[1] *Editor's Note:* The school and the community in this report are identified because the report demonstrates a procedure that other schools may wish to emulate; they may write directly to the school for additional information. The report is printed in this form by permission of Richard R. Clopper, Assistant Superintendent, Secondary Education, Board of Education of Anne Arundel County.

[2] Max Rascovich, *The Bedford Incident* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1963).

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2. What do you feel might be the result of reading this book?____
_____
3. For what age group would you recommend this book?_____
_____
4. Is there anything good about this book? Page 101
5. Did you read the entire book? Yes What parts?_____
_____
6. Are you aware of the judgment of this book by literary critics?
Yes and I ask, why was the book chosen for school after someone, I'm sure, read them.
7. What do you believe is the theme of this book?_____
_____
8. What would you like your school to do about this book?
_____ do not assign it to my child.
x withdraw it from all students as well as my child.
_____ Send it to the County Book Evaluation Committee for reevaluation.
9. In its place what book of equal literary quality would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of our civilization? _____

(Signature of Complainant)

The reply sent to the complainant by the assistant superintendent describes in detail the steps the school took in resolving the problem.

January 24, 1964

Dear Mr._____:

I am writing in response to your written comp[illegible]t about *The Bedford Incident,* the book which your son borrowed from the Severna Park High School library. Your communication was sent to me by the principal of the school and the library supervisor for the Anne Arundel County Schools. At the outset, I want you to know that I appreciate your concern and appreciate as well the manner in which you brought the matter to the attention of the school authorities.

I should like to review the steps that I have followed in considering the complaint. Incidentally, while these steps were being taken, the book was removed from the shelves of the Severna Park library.

1. I reviewed again the procedures used by our librarians in the selection of books and was reassured that the Library Book Evaluation Committee does its work carefully and in accordance with definite standards as specified by our own school system and by library authorities throughout the country.[3]

   In the selection of *The Bedford Incident,* for example, the committee was supported by reviews made by other authoritative groups such as the American Library Association. The book also has received the approval of other libraries in the area. The Enoch Pratt Library of Baltimore City with strong recommendations added it to their young people's collections of the Baltimore County Public Library and the Annapolis Public Library as well.

2. I read the book myself and then asked the following people to serve as an advisory committee to assist in evaluating the book in question.
   . . . , Supervisor of School Libraries, State Department of Education
   . . . , Librarian, Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Public Library
   . . . , Supervisor of Libraries, Anne Arundel County Public Schools
   . . . , Principal, Severna Park High School
   . . . , Librarian, Severna Park High School
   . . . , Supervisor of English, Anne Arundel County Public Schools
   Each committee member was given a copy of your request for reconsideration and was asked to read the book carefully.

3. The committee met for several hours with me on January 10, discussed the book thoroughly, and agreed unanimously that the book should remain a part of Severna Park's library. The committee members were aware of the inclusion of certain expletives and obnoxious terms, but felt that the language was in no way used in a suggestive or prurient sense. The author in more than one place in the book has his main character criticize the unwanted use of such language. Indeed, the one character who is largely guilty of using unacceptable language is the "lost" character in the book, the one who at the conclusion is called an "orphan."

   The committee pointed out that the theme of the book is concerned with real problems of today which are extremely pertinent to young people. Throughout the story the main characters are depicted as people who are under great emotional strain primarily because of their

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[3] A copy of the procedures used in Anne Arundel County follows this letter.

loyalty to naval tradition and their intense involvement with their country and its security.

4. Since then, I have read a number of professional reviews which had been provided by the advisory committee. All were favorable. I enclose copies of some of the reviews for your information.

I am convinced that the initial approval by the Library Book Evaluation Committee of *The Bedford Incident* was a sound decision. It must be clearly understood, however, that the selection of this book for our libraries does not in any way indicate the school system's approval of certain language that is used in the book nor does it imply the recommended use of such language by our pupils.

Again, may I express my appreciation for your interest in our library materials.

Sincerely,

. . .

Assistant Superintendent

Book Selection Policy of the Anne Arundel County Schools

"The right to read, like all rights embedded in our constitutional traditions, can be used wisely or foolishly. In many ways education is an effort to improve the quality of the choices which are the exercise of this right. But to deny the opportunity of choice in the fear that it may unwisely be used is to destroy the freedom itself. For this reason, we respect the right of individuals to be selective in their own reading and of individuals and groups to express their views for the guidance of others. But for the same reason, we oppose efforts by individuals or groups to limit the freedom of choice of others or to impose their own standards or tastes upon a community at large.

". . . Many works of literature important in our culture contain isolated elements to which some individuals may object. . . . the value and impact of any literary work must be examined as a whole and not in part—the impact of the entire work transcending words, phrases, or incidents out of which it is made."

The above statement from *The Students' Right to Read* published by the National Council of Teachers of English embodies the basic principles on which the book selection policy of the Anne Arundel County schools is based. We also accept the responsibility of the school library as set forth in the School Library Bill of Rights.[4]

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[4] A copy of the School Library Bill of Rights follows this statement of the book selection policy.

With these basic ideas in mind the following specific principles are set forth for those responsible for selecting books for the school libraries of Anne Arundel County.

1. The first responsibility of the school library is to provide materials which support and enrich the curriculum. These should be selected with variations of interest and maturity levels of students in mind. Primary consideration should be given to lists prepared by consulting supervisors and bibliographies contained in curriculum guides. Librarians, who have many review media at hand, should work with teachers in preparing lists to be given to students and should feel free to offer suggestions for additions or deletions as the occasion arises. However, once a title appears on a list which has been approved by the appropriate supervisor or department as required reading for students, the library is obligated to provide it.

2. It is often through use of the school library that academically talented students may be able to go beyond the confines of the curriculum to gain factual knowledge or stimulate literary appreciation. Thus elementary schools should feel free to select advanced materials when they are needed and high schools should be sure that their collections contain a wide range of adult titles to satisfy the needs of advanced students.

3. In contrast to the above, the library should also provide for the slow reader. High school librarians should make every effort to locate materials of high interest, low reading level to whatever extent they are needed, always bearing in mind that literary quality is a major criterion at any level.

4. Each book should be judged on its own merits, not the merits of its author, or publisher or a series of which it might be a part. Publishers' catalogs are designed to sell books, not to analyze them critically and therefore should *never* be used as a basis for selection.

5. Libraries should provide materials representing both sides of controversial issues. Access to such materials will help students develop critical thinking.

6. The Young People's Department of the Pratt Library has stated very well a policy for selection of books on religion. "Religious books of an obviously denominational nature whose primary purpose is to present one sect as superior to another are not purchased for young people's collections, nor are books that belittle any faith. Only well-written books that make no attempt to sway the emotions of the adolescent toward or against any one faith should be included in special collections for young people."

7. In ordering books look carefully at the collection as a whole and make selections which will build it up in areas which are weak and will broaden and deepen areas in which the basic titles are already in the collection.

8. At this time there are many groups and individuals who are acting as self-appointed censors of books and libraries. If you receive a complaint, handle it politely and agree to give it every consideration. Do not make any commitment as to the disposition of the case. Inform your principal immediately, if he has not been contacted. Offer to send the complainant a copy of the attached form if he would like to put his complaint in writing. If it is impossible to handle the case within the school to the satisfaction of all concerned, it may be referred to a committee at the county level, which is being organized for that purpose.

School Library Bill of Rights

School libraries are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms and with the preservation of these freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens. To this end the American Association of School Librarians reaffirms the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association and asserts that the responsibility of the school library is:

To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of the pupils served

To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards

To provide a background of information which will enable pupils to make intelligent judgments in their daily life

To provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to our American heritage

To place principle above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive collection appropriate for the users of the library.

CASE STUDY IX

LITERATURE IN CLASSROOM AND LIBRARY

This high school district in an upper middle class suburban community near Chicago is located in an area which boasts the highest average of educational achievement and the highest average income in the nation. Where one comprehensive high school served widely separated farm and village communities fifteen years ago, there are now five high schools, each having more than 2,000 students. As farm land has given way to housing developments, the influx of new families and the mobility of population have required flexible and comprehensive educational planning.

Parents openly express pride in their schools, the staffs, and the educational programs. Citizens' lay committees have worked to pass frequent referendums for buildings and for extended programs. The board of education has encouraged innovation, experimentation, and improvement in curriculums and services through faculty workshops, inservice meetings, released time projects, and board studies of curriculum.

Three requests for reconsideration of materials being used in classrooms or available at the school libraries have been studied by a district committee. In June of 1965, a mother asked for reconsideration of *All Fall Down,* by Leo Herlihy,[1] with the hope that the book would be removed from the library. The objection was to certain passages which the parent felt were unnecessarily frank and offensive to good taste. The parent also questioned the educational value of the book. The second request concerned *The Catcher in the Rye,*

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[1] James L. Herlihy, *All Fall Down* (New York: Pocket Books, 1961).

by J. D. Salinger,[2] being used in an honors English III class. The objection again concerned certain passages and words found to be vulgar. The parent also felt that Holden Caulfield was a negative character, not one to be suggested as a personality to be imitated or admired. The third request came from a mother who was concerned that her daughter had been asked to read short stories in the library where she was exposed unnecessarily to stories dealing with sexual perversion and debauchery in the book *Great English Short Stories*, edited by Christopher Isherwood.[3] The parent felt the book should not be on the library shelves where students would be exposed to it. (Notice here that the book was not assigned specifically. The teacher asked students to read widely in the short story section. The parent submitted her objections after the student had read the stories and discussed them with her mother.)

Nowhere was there indication that these requests for reconsideration of materials were the result of organizations' objections to the works. All requests seemed to come from genuine concern by parents rather than from group involvement, even though ultra-conservatives are well represented in the various communities of the district.

When the first request was received, a referral committee, consisting of an instructional coordinator, an assistant principal for instructional services, the head librarian, the division head or department chairman, and an English teacher read the book in question and considered all facets of the complaint. The complaints were handled quickly, and the complainant was kept informed about the activities of the committee as the committee worked toward its report. In each instance, the complainant was commended for her interest in the school, its library, and the book selection policies. She was assured that each complaint would be considered on its own merits. The book selection procedure was explained, and aids used in

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[2] J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951).

[3] Christopher Isherwood (ed.), *Great English Short Stories* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1957).

selecting books were listed in the final report to the complainant. The reports stressed the importance (1) of making materials available for those students whose parents would not object, (2) of not depriving any student the right and privilege of reading the book, and (3) of weighing individual tastes against the tastes of the entire school community.

Specific remarks about each book included the following. The committee felt that although *All Fall Down* might be a dull book to some readers, it is stylistically interesting, and the content is a realistic representation of the nature of some segments of modern American society. The committee found that the theme, the universal need for love, is obvious and worthy of explication, and that Mr. Herlihy presented it with freshness and originality. Concerning *The Catcher in the Rye*, the committee said that the book is not only defensible as a high school English assignment but also highly desirable as a novel for classroom use. Students, particularly able students, can identify with Holden Caulfield; they share many of his criticisms of society, and they still possess much of his idealistic spirit. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a book of love, and its condemnation of hypocrisy is a voice worth hearing, particularly in our suburban world. The committee felt that Holden's actions, when carefully studied, reveal an affirmative character rather than a negative one. They also voted to leave *Great English Short Stories* on the library shelves, recognizing that parental objection might well influence the assignment of the book to a particular student. Here they cited the diversity both in subject matter and style as merits of the book. In each of the three reports, the committee cited evaluations of the books by professional critics in such publications as *Book Review Digest*, *Library Journal*, *Saturday Review*, *Booklist*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* as further substantiation of the committee's evaluations of the books.

Although no attempts were made to keep requests from parents hidden, no publicity was given the requests. The referral committee members were free to discuss the requests with other staff members, and all staff members were made aware of the committee's work and final reports.

LIBRARY REFERRAL COMMITTEE REPORT

June 9, 1965

As a result of a complaint lodged against the presence in the P_____ High School library of the novel *All Fall Down,* by Leo Herlihy, a library referral committee composed of an instructional coordinator, the principal of the P_____ High School, three librarians, and two English teachers read the book and considered the complaint in all its facets.

First of all, we wish to commend the complainant for her interest in the school, in its library, and in its book selection policy. We hope that residents will always feel free to inquire into our practices and methods, following the time-honored tradition of citizen concern for the public schools and their libraries. Complaints which are lodged against books should always be processed in this manner, and each individual complaint will be considered on its own merits.

Secondly, it is important that citizens know that book selection in our high school libraries is not done in a random manner. Librarians in our district use the following aids in book selection.

(1) American Library Association *Booklist* and *Subscription Books Bulletin*
(2) *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries*
(3) R. R. Bowker Company's *Library Journal*
(4) *Saturday Review*
(5) H. W. Wilson Company's *Book Review Digest*
(6) *New York Times Book Review Section* (Sunday editions)
(7) *New York Herald Tribune Book Week* (Sunday editions)[4]
(8) R. R. Bowker Company's *American Book Publishing Record*

With such a wide range of aids, our librarians make choices for the libraries, all the while not excluding teacher requests for certain publications.

As to our final decision regarding the suggestion that *All Fall Down* be reevaluated, we wish to report that our recommendation is that the book not be removed from the shelves. This recommendation was unanimous. We based our conclusion on the following factors:

1. That the book had not been assigned as required reading and was placed on the shelf for general consumption by students whose parents would not object to their children reading the novel.

2. That removing the book would deprive other students from reading such a book which to our knowledge has not been a source of controversy before.

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[4] *Editor's Note:* This periodical is no longer in existence.

3. That despite the fact that one committee member found the book dull and another suggested he would not have recommended the book, five of the seven committee members found the book stylistically interesting and the content to be a realistic representation of the nature of some segments of modern American society.

4. That a majority of the committee did not find some of the language, objectionable to the complainant, to be offensive and inserted for its own sake but an integral part of the book; and that no book should be censored on the grounds of one passage or several passages but that the book as a whole must have worth.

5. That the theme, the universal need for love, is obvious and worthy of explication, and that Mr. Herlihy has presented it with freshness and originality.

6. That the majority of the committee agrees with the overwhelmingly favorable evaluation of the book by professional critics at the time of its publication, as recorded in *Book Review Digest, 1960,* which quotes from reviews in *Library Journal, Chicago Tribune, Kirkus, [New York Herald Tribune,] New York Times, Saturday Review,* and *Time.*

After introductory material similar to that used in the *All Fall Down* incident, the Library Referral Committee presented this conclusion to a reconsideration of *The Catcher in the Rye,* by J. D. Salinger.

LIBRARY REFERRAL COMMITTEE REPORT

December 13, 1965

. . . . . .

Our final decision regarding *The Catcher in the Rye* is that the book remain on the library shelf and that its classroom use be determined by the English teacher, recognizing that parental objection might well influence the assignment of the book to a particular student. This recommendation was unanimous. We based our conclusion on the following factors:

1. The book was placed on the shelf for general consumption by students whose parents would not object to their children's reading the novel.

2. Removing the book would deprive other students of reading it.

3. Individual tastes should not dictate standards for the entire school community.

4. The total evaluation of *The Catcher in the Rye* must be based upon the work as a whole. Conclusions can not be drawn from any element of a work taken out of its context.

5. *The Catcher in the Rye* is not only defensible as a high school English assignment but highly desirable as a novel for classroom use. Students, particularly able students, can identify with Holden Caulfield; they share many of his criticisms of society, and they still possess much of his idealistic spirit. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a book of love, and its condemnation of hypocrisy is a voice worth hearing, particularly in our suburban world.

6. *The Catcher in the Rye* should be evaluated for its contemporary values. The book serves as a metaphor for the whole of human experience. Such a work may help the student discover who he is and where he is going.

7. Holden Caulfield must not be evaluated as a negative character. A close study of the book will reveal Holden's actions as affirmative.

8. The committee agrees with the overwhelmingly favorable evaluation of the book by professional critics at the time of its publication as recorded in *Book Review Digest, 1951,* which quotes from reviews in *Chicago Sunday Tribune, Library Journal, Saturday Review, San Francisco Chronicle, Booklist,* and *The Atlantic Monthly.*

The Library Referral Committee repeated the introductory material used in the two incidents cited above and then gave this conclusion to a reconsideration of *Great English Short Stories,* edited by Christopher Isherwood.

LIBRARY REFERRAL COMMITTEE REPORT

April 26, 1966

. . . . . .

Our final decision regarding *Great English Short Stories* is that the book remain on the library shelf and that its classroom use be determined by the English teacher, recognizing that parental objection might well influence the assignment of the book to a particular student. This recommendation was unanimous. We based our conclusion on the following factors:

1. The book was placed on the shelf for general consumption by students whose parents would not object to their children reading the book.

2. Removing the book would deprive other students of reading it.

3. Individual tastes should not dictate standards for the entire school community.

4. The total evaluation of *Great English Short Stories* must be based upon the work as a whole. Conclusion can not be drawn from any element of a work taken out of its context.

5. Authors represented in *Great English Short Stories* have been widely accepted as some of the best in the short story field.

6. The short stories in the book are widely diversified in both subject matter and styles of writing.

MEMORANDUM May 4, 1965
To: Members of Library Referral Committees
FROM: Coordinator of Library Services

After the first formal meeting the points discussed were reviewed with the superintendent. What follows will be the operational format for all future committees.

1. All Library Referral Committees will be chaired by the Instructional Coordinator for Library Services.

2. This chairman will acknowledge receipt of a formal complaint and will send the complainant a step by step list of the anticipated activities of the referral committee.

3. This chairman will notify all Principals, Librarians, appropriate Division Heads and Department Chairmen that the complaint has been received; title of book, its author, publisher, etc., for their edification.

4. The chairman will schedule the number of meetings necessary to complete the business of the committee.

5. The final report of the committee will be jointly authored by the appropriate Division Head, Department Chairman and the Head Librarian for that building. This report will be submitted through the Committee Chairman to the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Principals, Head Librarians, the appropriate Division Heads, Department Chairmen, and to the complainant.

6. At the time this report is submitted, the activities of this particular committee will be considered concluded. If the complainant is dissatisfied

with the results, it is anticipated that the complainant would contact either the principal or the superintendent, in which case it is assumed appropriate action would be taken. Should the complainant contact the Committee Chairman or any member of the committee, the complainant should be referred to either the building principal or the district superintendent.

7. Finally, no other library would be required to remove the book from its shelves as a result of this complaint and pending action by the committee. However, at the discretion of the principal and/or librarian, the book may be removed or restricted when such complaints are received.

APPENDIX

BOOK SELECTION PROCEDURE
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS
WAPPINGERS CENTRAL SCHOOL
WAPPINGERS FALLS, NEW YORK

Book Selection Committee

Organization: The committee will consist of two independent subcommittees representing respectively the junior and senior high schools. Each subcommittee will consist of three members, with each grade level represented by one member nominated by his appropriate grade level chairman. Members will serve for two years and will be eligible for renomination.

Duties: Evaluate titles nominated by teachers for inclusion on the English Department's official supplementary list (school-purchased books which may be assigned as required reading for the grade and group indicated) and file rationales for books approved.

Cooperate with the school's publicity officer in preparing publicity on the supplementary reading program.

Consider any complaint by a parent or taxpayer concerning any book on the supplementary list issued by a teacher as required reading.

Process: A teacher who wishes to propose the adoption of a text for the official supplementary list will complete a "Supplementary Book Adoption Request" and submit it to the chairman of the appropriate subcommittee of the Book Selection Committee. The chairman will then assign a member of his subcommittee to read the book and the teacher's rationale for teaching it. As soon as the committee

member is prepared, the chairman will call a meeting of his committee to review the book. By request of the reporting member, or at the discretion of the chairman or by committee vote, one other member of the committee may be asked to review the book.

After a final decision has been reached by the subcommittee, the chairman will report such decision to the requesting teacher and file the original request form, with action noted by signatures, with the department head.

In consideration of the proposed book, *each member of the subcommittee will vote as though he were trying to decide whether or not to teach the book for the grade and group indicated.*

The committee will report approval or disapproval to the teacher concerned and to the department head.

If the title is approved by the majority vote of the subcommittee and department head, the title will be added to the official supplementary list.

If the teacher takes exception to a negative vote by the subcommittee, or to the department head's veto of the committee's affirmative vote, the title will be taken under consideration by the department, acting as committee of the whole. A majority vote of approval will confirm the choice, a negative vote will reject it.

In case of a negative vote by the committee of the whole, the nominating teacher will have the permission of the department head to ask the approval of the building principal.

If a teacher, department head, administrator, or board member receives an oral or written complaint about any book assigned as required reading, or alleged to have been so assigned, the following process will be followed, *without exception*.

If the complainant telephones or writes, he should be listened to or answered courteously, but the recipient will make no statement of fact, commitment, admission of guilt, promise, or threat! If the person receiving the call is an administrator, he will invite the complainant to meet with him and the department head. If the recipient is a board member, he will volunteer to arrange a meeting of the

superintendent and department head. If the recipient is the teacher who issued the book, he will invite the complainant to meet with him at school. The department head will be present.

If the complainant refuses to meet with school personnel as suggested above, offer to send him a copy of the "Citizen's Request for Reconsideration of a Book" so that he may submit a formal statement to the Book Selection Committee.

If the complainant appears at the conference suggested above, he will, if he continues to indicate objection to his child's reading the book in question, be assured that his child does not have to read the book, and that another assignment will be substituted. If he requests any other action—such as withdrawing the book from the official supplementary list, ask him to fill out the questionnaire. If he declines, point out that we must have a formal answer to questions 1, 5, 7 and 8 before there can be any reconsideration of the title's suitability.

If the book is referred to the appropriate subcommittee of the Book Selection Committee, a period of at least a week will be set aside for reappraisal of the book and consideration of the complaint. At the end of this period the complainant will be invited to meet with the committee, department head, building principal and/or superintendent. At this meeting, the committee will announce its decisions and the rationale for the decision.

No administrative decision, if such is ultimately deemed necessary, will be made until the above process, as outlined, is terminated.

This might be followed by such confirmative or dissenting action as the Board of Education might think necessary.

Citizen's Request For Reconsideration of a Book

Author_____

Title _____

( ) Hardcover ( ) Paperback

Publisher (if known)_____

Request initiated by_____

Telephone _____ Address_____

City_____ Zip Code_____

Complainant represents: ( ) himself;
( ) (name organization) _____
( ) (identify other group) _____

1. To what in the book do you object? (Please be specific; cite pages.) _____
2. What do you feel might be the result of reading this book? _____
3. For what age group would you recommend this bok? _____
4. Is there anything good about this book? _____
5. Did you read the entire book? _____ What parts? _____
6. Are you aware of the judgment of this book by literary critics? _____
7. What do you believe is the theme of this book? _____
8. What would you like your school to do about thi book?
   _____ do not assign it to my child
   _____ send it back to the English Book Selecion Committee for reevaluation
9. In its place, what book of equal literary quality would you recommend that would convey as valuable a picture and perspective of our civilization? _____

Date _____

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOK ADOPTION REQUEST AND RATIONALE

Author _____
Title _____
Publisher _____
List price _____
Paperback ( ) Hardbound ( )
Teacher _____
Date of request _____
Grade & group of students _____

In the space provided, number typed answers to the following:

1. What is the theme of the book? The author's purpose?
2. As to literary value, give your opinion and critics' reactions.
3. In general, why should this selection be studied by students at the grade and group level indicated? Specifically, what is there of unique value not already contributed by books on list?
4. Indicate any general objections which might be made to our teaching this book. Indicate any objectionable passages by page. How do you justify recommendation in the light of any such objection?
5. Is title listed in the *Standard Catalog for High School Libraries?*
   ( ) Yes. ( ) No.

   In NCTE's *Books for You?* ( ) Yes. ( ) No.

Book Selection Subcommittee action (by signature):

Committee reader_____
Approved ( ) No ( )

Subcommittee chairman _____
Approved ( ) No ( )

Department head_____
Approved ( ) No ( )

Date rationale filed with department head_____

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THE END

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